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The author considers the etymological sources and phonetic changes which have occurred in such words as "bangi," "butu," "kalua," "mrututu," and "sambarau." The source of these words, which have found a place in Swahili, has been doubted or could not be established by compilers of different Swahili dictionaries. The author feels that the study and consideration of these various words very clearly indicate that those foreign words in Swahili whose derivation has not been clearly established may have their origin somewhere else than in East Africa. "It therefore becomes necessary and of the utmost improtance for the furtherance of Swahili studies to compile various dictionaries of other languages which have had connections with this lingua franca of East Africa." Suggested by the author are the compilation of Arabic/Swahili, Swahili/Arabic; Persian/Swahili, Swahili/Persian; and Gujarati-Hindi/Swahili, Swahili/Gujarati-Hindi dictionaries. (AMM)

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ETYMOLOGICAL AND PHONETIC CHANGES AMONG FOREIGN WORDS IN KISWAHILI

by R. B. Patel

Change is considered to be the spice of life. This maxim is equally true for language. Look at a language, its sentences, phrases and words, their etymological and phonetic structure. These and various other topics create at once an absorbing interest for a linguist—especially words, and their journey from the known to the unknown and vice versa.

Etymology may be defined as the science of tracing accounts of the origin, growth and development of words, whereas phonetics deals with sounds. The study of this dual topic is both challenging as well as fascinating.

Swahili has never hesitated to adopt and adapt words from both East and West, and scholars and research workers from the West have spared no pains to trace and establish the origin and growth of numerous words. The Standard Swahili Dictionaries (Swahili/English and English/Swahili) are the products of the hard, laborious work undertaken by the compilers. They have endeavoured to establish the etymology of numerous foreign words which have found their way into Kiswahili.

The reader of the Standard Swahili-English Dictionary will find several words with a question mark, indicating that the derivation of these words has not been conclusively determined, or rather that the source of those words stated to be from Arabic, Persian or other foreign language has been doubted. The study of these words of unspecified and doubtful origin or derivation provides a challenge to probe deeper into this subject.

It has been my earnest endeavour to study the language from a historical point of view.

Let us consider words such as:—
(i) Bangi, (ii) Butu, (iii) Kalua, (iv) Mrututu and (v) Zambarau, which have found a place in Swahili and whose source has been doubted or could not be established by the compilers of the Dictionary. Let us also consider the growth and development of these words and their journey from one language to another*

Bangi:

It appears that this word has travelled from the East to other parts of the world. It is an established fact that the English language has also borrowed this word from Hindustani and is spelt Bhang or Bang.

Similarly Swahili has also adopted this word. The Standard Swahili English Dictionary states its derivation to be from Persian. It might be that the Persian word found its way into Swahili, but it is also interesting to note that Persian is a sister language of Sanskrit. The labio-dental consonant BH (voiced aspirate) appears to be absent in both the Persian and Arabic. The following examples will suffice to show how the "bh" in Sanskrit corresponds to "b" in Persian:—

Sanskrit	*Persian*
Bhumi	Bum (old Persian—Bumi Avestan—Bumi (Earth))
Bhru	Abru (Eye brow)
Bhratra	Biradar (Brother)

* The following Dictionaries have been referred to in basing these discussions:
1. A Standard Swahili—English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1951 edition)
2. Saarth Gujarati Jodnikosh (Gujarat Vidyapeeth 4th Edition — 1949)
3. Pramanik Hindi Kosh (2nd Edition — Hindi Sahitya Kutir, Banaras)
4. Hindustani — Gujarati Kosh (Gujarat Vidyapeeth Ahemedabad — 2nd Revised Edition — 1945). See Table I.

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It seems correct to surmise that the Swahili word Bangi has not only its root in Persian "Bang", but also in Bhang!

The fact is that the original word has been assimilated in Swahili with the final vowel occurring. It is apparent that the final vowel found in Swahili is absent both in Persian and in Indian languages.

Butu:

If "Butu" is derived from the Portuguese word "Boto" it would be interesting to find out how "o" has changed to "u" in Swahili.

Apropos of this there is a word *Butthu* in Gujarati, having the same meaning as *Butu* of Swahili. In Indian languages such as Gujarati and Hindi, there are two U vowels—short and long. The latter, when transliterated in the Roman script is represented by "oo".

Butthu consists of five phonemes (B+U+T+TH+U). The middle phonemes *t* and *th* are retroflex plosives. When a comparison is made of two words, viz. *Boto* and *Butthu* in view of the derivation of the Swahili *Butu*, the following changes may have taken place:

Portuguese to Swahili: Boto > Butu
Gujarati to Swahili: Butthu > Butu

In the former, the vowel "O" is changed to U. Whereas in the latter, *Butthu* has dropped its retroflex consonant *th* (plosive-aspirate), before it finally became *Butu* in Swahili. As regards the meaning of *Butu* or *Butthu*, there has been no difference. Secondly, in some of the Gujarati dialects, especially spoken in East Africa, there is a tendency to pronounce 'heavy' *t* instead of *th*.

TABLE I

Page No.	Swahili English	Page No.	Gujarati Jodnikosh	Page No.	Pramanik Hindikosh
28.	Bangi(n) Bhang, Indian hemp often chewed or smoked and used in various sweet preparations, a strong intoxicant.	857	Bhang(n) An intoxicant (from Sanskrit: Bhangi)	961	Bhang(n) meaning as contained in the first two. (from Sanskrit–Bhrungi)
43.	Butu (adj) Blunt (fr.? Port—Boto—Blunt)	823	Butthu (adj) Blunt.	—	—
168	Kalua (n) The name given to a sect of Indian fishermen, also in some places to boatboys (?Hindi)	311	Kharvo (n) a sailor a seaman. (fr. Sanskrit Kshar+vah)		*Hindustani, Gujarati Kosh* 95 Kharva (n) a sailor.
300	Mrututu (n) sulphate of copper. Bluestone, blue vitriol often used as a caustic for sores. In some places cooked with gruel and eaten as a medicine for yaws. (? Arabic blue medicinal stone)	935	Morthuthu (n) Blue vitriol, sulphate of copper. (Sanskrit—Mayur tuttha)		Morthuthia (n) Blue vitriol

538	Zambarau (n) a small fruit somewhat resembling a damson or sloe used as adjective of colour i.e. purple	478	Jambu (n) Fruit of the jambudo tree i.e. rose apple. (2) Adjective—Jambudu or jamudo (i.e. purple) (Sanskrit—Jambu)	441	Jambu or Jamum(n) meaning as in Gujarati (Sanskrit-Jambu

Kalua:

Without any hesitation, it can be said that the Indian "*kharva*" has become "*kalua*" in Swahili. The original Sanskrit word *Kshar+vah* (literally it means the carrier of salt) gives us an idea that it relates to something connected with salt. Before it became *Kharvo* (singular) and *Kharva* (plural) in Gujarati the original word must have undergone phonetic changes.

Both in Gujarati and Hindi, unlike Swahili, the nouns are classified according to genders, and the word in question is spelt as:—

Kharvo—Singular Masculine
Kharva or Kharvao Plural Masculine
Kharvan—Singular Feminine
Kharvano—Plural Feminine

Similarly the meaning appears to have been changed, since the original Sanskrit word has been finally absorbed in Gujarati and Swahili. As this is a topic to be discussed under semantics, it is not necessary to dilate on this here. However, one historical fact should be remembered that Gujarati, the maritime province of Western India, was connected with the East African Coast from time imemorial.

The fact is that while the Indian word *Kharvo or Kharva* is used by seamen generally it appears that in Swahili the meaning has been restricted. There may be reasons for this. The early Gujarati seamen were among the first batches of Indians who were in touch with the East African Coast.

Now let us turn to the phonetic changes. In Swahili "Kh" is usually replaced by "H" where borrowed Arabic words are involved. In this case the consonant Kh falls in the category of velar-voiceless aspirate, and it has been changed to K (unvoiced explosive velar) in Swahili. Similarly "r" is replaced by "l". As is known these two liquid alveolar consonants r and l are interchangeable. Hence the principle laid down by Tucker & Ashton in their invaluable "Swahili Phonetics" at pages 99/100 is applicable to change r to l. The Indian semi vowel "V" has changed to U. Thus we got Kharva > Kalua, in Swahili.

Mrututu:

In the Standard Swahili-English Dictionary, the derivation of the word from Arabic (a blue medicinal stone) has been doubted. There are various points involved regarding the etymolcgy of this word. As far as the meaning in its strict sence is concerned, (both in Swahili and Gujarati) it conveys the same meaning. There is no doubt that Swahili has borrowed this word from a foreign tongue, and Gujarati as well as Hindi have borrowed it from their mother tongue, viz. Sanskrit (Mayurtuttha). In Indian languages this has a deep meaning. The first part of the word *Mayur* means a peacock. Because of the resemblance of colour of the article it is called *Mayurtuttha. Mayur* has changed to *Mor* for peacock in Gujarati and other Indian languages. Thus Sanskrit *Mayurtuttha* changed to Gujarati *Morthuthu.*

There is another point to be remembered. The Arabs were not ignorant of India. During the Mogul Rule of India the Yunani system of medicine contributed to the general welfare of India. The Arabs were also aware of the Hindu system of medicine, i.e. Ayurveda. It might be, therefore, that the Arabs may have borrowed the word from Indian languages.

From phonetic analysis, it does not sound proper that the final consonant changed to "*t*" in Swahili, because Arabic has *th*, which appears to be absent in the word. The Gujarati dental consonant *th* is plosive—voiceless aspirated. Similarly the Swahili dental *t* consonant is also explosive aspirated. It therefore seems plausible that "*th*" has changed to "*t*". Thus making *Morthuthu> Mortutu > Mrututu.* There is another remarkable change i.e. *Mor >Mru*, which when pronounced, sounds somewhat Moru.

In view of all these, it is safe to surmise that Swahili has adopted the word from Gujarati.

Zambarau:

The derivation of this word in the Standard Swahili Dictionary is not shown, although it is indicated that the word is not of Bantu origin and therefore it becomes necessary to try to establish its etymology. The Dictionary gives the meaning as "a small fruit somewhat resembling a damson or sloe". This does not make the meaning very clear. It must be remembered that this fruit is the product of the tropical countries.

If the word has any root in Arabic or Persian, the learned compilers would have surely noticed this. In the absence of this let us look at some other avenues to trace its source of origin. This demands a look at Indian languages. There are then two languages viz. Gujarati and Hindi from which Swahili has borrowed several words.

This, at once, brings before us the Jambudo tree and its fruit Jambu. It appears that this fruit is the one about which the origin of the word Zambarau has to be discussed. The fruit comes under the category of neuter gender. The following table will show how it changes its form in plural:

Singular	*Plural*
Jambu	Jambudan

Sometimes 'Jambu' is also used to denote the collective sense of plural. When it is used as an adjective, the word becomes Jambudo, Jambudio etc. The meaning it conveys is the purple colour. Interestingly Zambarau when used as an adjective in Swahili conveys the same meaning.

Now let us turn to the phonetic aspect of these words:—

Jambudan > Zambarau.

The soft palatal J (unaspirate plosive) is alveolarized to Z (fricative voiced) retroflex. The vowel U is replaced by A. The consonant D (unaspirate plosive) has been changed to r. The conjunct consonant 'an' represented by the Sanskrit term Anusvara, is changed to Au in Swahili.

The study and consideration of these various words very clearly indicates that those foreign words in Swahili whose derivation has not been clearly established may have their origin somewhere else than in East Africa. It therefore becomes necessary and of the utmost importance for the furtherance of Swahili studies to compile various dictionaries of other languages which have had connections with this lingua franca of East Africa. To mention a few, the compilation of Arabic/Swahili, Swahili/Arabic, Persian/Swahili, Swahili/Persian; Gujarati-Hindi/Swahili; Swahili/Gujarati Hindi dictionaries would contribute greatly to this field and certainly inspire students of African languages and literature to carry out their researches with even greater chance of success.